

The Ethical Effects of Armed Drone Strikes under International Humanitarian Law

Kübra Yıldız

University of Southampton, Faculty of Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

Military operations involving armed drones lack direct human involvement, as these drones are remotely operated by personnel situated thousands of miles away from the conflict zones. This disconnects between drone operators and the reality of warfare may lead to ethical erosion in decision-making processes, fostering dehumanization and a diminished sense of responsibility. Operators, operating remotely, may lack direct understanding or awareness of the political, cultural, and social contexts in the areas where drone strikes are conducted, potentially leading to a lack of empathy for the human cost of warfare. Furthermore, this impersonal decision-making approach may increase the likelihood of errors in target selection and the risk of civilian harm, as exemplified by cases in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia where civilians have been mistakenly targeted while engaging in everyday activities. This paper will critically analyze how the distance between drone operators and the conflict zone influences their decision-making processes and examines whether this detachment undermines adherence to IHL principles, particularly the principle of humanity. Specifically, it will assess the moral implications arising from the physical and psychological distance between drone operators and the battlefield, exploring the ethical challenges posed by this detachment.

Keywords: armed drones, drone strike, ethical impact of drones, in the loop, international humanitarian law